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ABSTRACT

The current literature on school restructuring emphasizes cooperative learning, collaborative planning, teacher empowerment, and participative policy making. This literature tends to set aside client and technical perspectives and to exhibit a professional view, which deems accountability to be a politically incorrect issue. The literature on system restructuring shows that the decentralization of pedagogical, administrative, and governance power, with a simultaneous recentralization of control functions, has led to a consensus of cynicism among professionals and low policy legitimacy. This paper argues that responsibility in education implies accountability and that such accountability implies formative evaluation, educative reporting relationships, and politically critical planning. It mounts a case for the production of educative accountability policies. It proposes a policy research methodology that will both employ and test non-foundational epistemology. In sum, this paper reports policy research that is: (1) driven by a consequencialist moral theory; (2) attempting to reconcile professional, client, and technical perspectives through the active engagement of school, district, and state-level stakeholders in Tasmania; and (3) intended to apply and evaluate non-foundational epistemology. (Contains 96 references.) (Author/LMI)

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The current literature on school restructuring emphasises cooperative learning, collaborative planning, teacher empowerment and participative policy making. This literature tends to set aside client and technical perspectives and to exhibit a professional view; a view that deems accountability to be a politically incorrect issue. The literature on system restructuring shows that the decentralisation of pedagogical, administrative and governance power, with a simultaneous recentralisation of control functions, has led to a consensus of cynicism among professionals and low policy legitimacy. This paper argues that responsibility in education implies accountability and that such accountability implies formative evaluation, educative reporting relationships and politically critical planning. It mounts a case for the production of educative accountability policies. It proposes a policy research methodology that will both employ and test non-foundational epistemology. In sum, this paper reports policy research that is (a) driven by a consequencialist moral theory, (b) attempting to reconcile professional, client and technical perspectives through the active engagement of school, district and state level stake-holders in Tasmania, and (c) intended to apply and evaluate non-foundational epistemology.

A recent analysis of the restructuring movement in the USA (Murphy, 1993) identified the four most common strategies as (a) proving choice and voice for parents, (b) school-based management, (c) teacher empowerment, and (d) teaching for understanding. These strategies were related to two themes of restructuring; the marketization of education and the redefinition of the roles of educational stakeholders. The marketization theme was held to be evident in attempts to privatise schooling, introduce market forces, deregulate education and provide greater accountability. The calls for greater accountability, often specified as outcome-based measures of student and school performance, were traced to attacks on the dysfunctional aspects of educational bureaucracies, beliefs that competition will enhance teaching and learning, and to convictions that a good deal of educational expenditure should be transferred from the public to the private sector.

The stakeholder theme highlighted role changes for learners, teachers, administrators and parents. Learning was reportedly conceived less as cognitive behaviour and more as constructivist action in a social context. Teaching was being defined less as technical instruction and more as learning enablement and as professional co-management. Administration was apparently less concerned with exercising positional authority and more to do with transforming relationships, services and governance. Parents appeared to be seen less as passive advisers and more as policy partners, co-teachers and community builders.

Murphy & Hallinger (1993) concluded that schools should, therefore, 'backward map' from students learning, see restructuring as an ongoing and constructivist process, and work systematically at all levels while recognising the centrality of local stakeholders. This end point, a politically critical condition, was echoed twice when they identified the key elements of supportive infrastructure; the backing of key external constituencies, time, sufficient material resources, professional development, cross-fertilisation, trust, working structures and effective policy

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legitimation. It is curious that the concept of accountability was left relatively undeveloped, as it is in other classic texts (e.g., Fullan, 1991).

In contrast, a critical review of school-based management (SBM) literature (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992) found that while the concept of SBM is pervasive, there are many forms in existence without clear goals or accountability. Further, they found (p. 537):

> that little substantive decision-making authority actually has been delegated to SBM programs. Where there is substance, the outcome concern is teacher morale and satisfaction; the impact on student learning is usually ignored .... The result is that connections between student learning -- the real objective of education policy -- and SBM are not probed and thus not discovered.

Critical views of SBM are available in another literature. Research into the origins of new administrative policy during the restructures in Australian and New Zealand state school systems (Macpherson, 1991a, p. 20), earlier research in the UK and the USA (Bush *et al.*, 1989, p. 86; Elmore, 1990), and a study of governance in the Scottish education system all identified the extent to which the assumptive world of educationalists was "deeply persuasive to those who shared it", and how, when educators had been socialised into this culture of professionalism, they became "busy, but blind" (McPherson & Raab, 1988, p. 99). Further, those who held this 'professional' perspective found client and technical views (see below) on accountability largely incomprehensible, even offensive. Finally, these studies also showed that the client perspective concerning accountability was the least known and the least influential of all three. The triplex typology of perspectives involved was elaborated by Elmore & Associates (1990) and is now summarised.

The technical perspective holds that schools will only improve if the teaching, learning and leadership practices that are introduced are based on scientifically validated knowledge. Reforming these 'core technologies' of schooling, it follows, requires a steady stream of new knowledge, effective implementation mechanisms and regular structural adjustments of power relationships. This technical approach highlights the role of mandated systemic priorities, a sound knowledge of what schools can achieve and reliable means of identifying actual achievements. Accountability is, therefore, to be accomplished by being clear on purposes, defining performance indicators, and then collecting objective performance data and giving them prominence in the next planning round. An example is Total Quality Management.

The client perspective suggests that schools will improve when educators account directly to their clients; parents, students and the community. Reforming the relationship between providers and clients, it is held, requires greater client choice, flexible resource management and policy responsiveness; in a word, consumerism. Accountability is, therefore, to be accomplished through political, market and managerial mechanisms such as clients governing school policy, competition, external audits and responsive human resource management and development. An example is where a community charter drives school development planning, management practices and evaluation.

The professional perspective takes the view that schools will improve when educators and their immediate leaders are given greater opportunity to develop skills, exercise judgement and have greater control over their work. Reforming the professionalism of teachers and school leaders, it is argued, requires special occupational conditions featuring autonomy, respect,

resources and expertise. This perspective questions the validity of non-professional views and the reliability of external evaluation, and promotes collegiality as an appropriate base for accountability criteria and processes. Accountability is, therefore, to be accomplished by deconstructing and reconstructing schooling, collaborative planning, and cooperative teaching and learning. An example is staff collaborative action research. And, from this perspective, the more traditional technical approach and consumerist perspectives are driven by bureaucratic, economic rationalist and New Right thinking. In a phrase, they are 'politically incorrect'.

THE BROADER CONTEXT

In Australia. the patterns of privatisation (Anderson, 1993) and the impacts of corporate managerialism have been mapped (Beare, 1989) and antidotes proposed (Duignan & Macpherson, 1991; Macpherson, 1992a). The decentralisation of administrative power to schools has focussed attention onto the excellence of local management (e.g.s Caldwell & Spinks, 1988, 1992; Beare *et al.*, 1989; Chapman, 1990) with some observers noting the displacement of other educational metavalues such as quality pedagogy, democracy and social equity in policy discourse (Chapman & Dunstan, 1991: Angus, 1992). Similar to overseas trends there has been a widespread adoption of social action theories of learning (Walker, *et al.*, 1987) and constructivist theories of teaching and professional development (Northfield, *et al.*, 1987). Unlike most international patterns, however, holistic, pragmatic and consequencialist theories of leadership (Evers, 1987) have accompanied the development of more inclusionary (Rizvi *et al.*, 1987) and more educative models of management (Duignan & Macpherson, 1993). Despite these later initiatives, the politics of education in Australia are yet to reconcile the divergent interests of Federal and State authorities and accommodate the plural perspectives of administrators, teachers and parents with effective policy making processes (Crowther & Ogilvie, 1992). It will be shown below that the remnants of technicist accountability policies are in disarray except where they are being reasserted.

In New Zealand, the basis of accountability in the post-Picot era has been the School Charter (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). This charter is negotiated between professionals, the state and the community and provides the basis for evaluation, reporting and development planning. Unfortunately, the role of the state has been changed by Ministerial edict without due regard to the balance of technicist, professional, consumerist and democratic principles embodied in the original design (Codd & Gordon, 1991). Schools' Boards of Trustees have found themselves, in recent times, engaged in bitter political contests with the state over funding responsibilities, relative policy powers and the appropriateness of market mechanisms (Cusack, 1993). The legitimacy of the state has been damaged.

In Britain, the Local Management of Schools (LMS) initiative attempted to shift powers to governing bodies and parents in order to improve accountability procedures and to make the distribution of public funds more equitable and efficient (Levacic, 1992). School and system administrators found LMS complex and challenging (Davies & Anderson, 1992). The proposed accountability mechanisms for teaching and school performance implied a major redistribution of power in favour of clients. Implementation appears to have partly stalled amid political controversy (Morris, 1991) despite a widespread realisation that formative evaluation is vital to professionals learning about how to teach better and develop their school (Mortimore & Mortimore, 1991). A recent study (Vann, 1993) has mapped the difficulties created at school

level. There are major tensions between the Government's requirement for information for the purposes of accountability and educationalists' need for information to enhance learning.

In Canada, while the dynamics and focus of system restructurings have varied by province in recent years, they have all considered market mechanisms and realigned the influence of stakeholders (Martin & Macpherson, 1993). A worrying counterpoint to the efforts to move towards transformative leadership (Leithwood, 1992) is the mounting evidence that teacher empowerment and site-based management have not led to demonstrable improvements in teaching. The coordinated co-development of schools and the district could yet provide effective forms of supportive infrastructure (Fullan, 1993).

The general evidence suggests that the political structures of education are not articulating policy compromises to an extent where professionals, administrators and clients feel that their views are being honoured, and honoured as reasonable expectations that can and are being discharged satisfactorily. Basic standards of public accountability are not being met in readily apparent answers to three questions; are administrative processes open and fair, are reasons given for decisions and documented, and are those who make decisions being held accountable for them? It also appears that the policy vacuums are felt most keenly wherever lapsed technical accountability structures are no longer regulating performance evaluation, reporting and improvement processes and formal alternatives have not been developed. The paradox is, that so long as the accountability issue is not politically correct among professionals, they will continue be exposed to the corrosive effects of feral criteria, arbitrary process and low legitimacy, all which will tend to make worse rather than to ameliorate the current situation. It could be time to consider an educative intervention, policy research.

TOWARDS REHABILITATING A POLITICALLY INCORRECT ISSUE

Antecedents

The first step to rehabilitation involves understanding more fully how a concern for accountability came to be a politically incorrect issue. A feature of the international examples of restructuring schools and school systems briefly examined above is the evidence of non-existent, doubtful, impotent, controversial and incoherent accountability policies. There is no case known of where the responsibilities of stakeholders are as codified as they once were in most settings when the myths of bureaucracy pertained. While this might be a good thing, in some senses, policy vacuums and ambiguities apparently bring a different and no less intense set of challenges.

The first general antecedent to the current situation is that the more traditional and technical accountability criteria and processes were seriously disturbed as centralist bureaucracies were radically down-scaled and when different combinations of pedagogical, administrative and governance powers were decentralised. However, when most governments simultaneously recentralised key control functions, and generated a new consensus of cynicism (Kirst, 1990, Beare & Boyd, 1993), the legitimacy of accountability structures fell further into disarray and disrepute.

The second general antecedent is the change in policy processes. In the late 1970s the policy cycle in education tended to move sedately through the Westminster process; election mandate, Green Paper, White Paper, Parliamentary debate and decision, and then the mobilisation of support structures and implementation (e.g., Frazer *et al.*, 1988). The process generated

relatively high levels of consensus between stakeholders, permitted reasonable degrees of expert and professional participation, and had recognisable stages and cycles, albeit sometimes accomplished at a pachydermous pace. By the late 1980s, governments were tending to respond much more in haste to issues whenever they became politicised or whenever the Minister chose to intervene. Task forces of outsiders, usually contracted personally by Ministers or their equivalents, generated proposals within months, often without the significant involvement of educators. Once their proposals were approved by Cabinets, and quickly launched as policy, schools were expected to implement the changes, with predictable degrees of resistance and alienation amongst professionals. The cynicism deepened and the remaining legitimacy of technical accountability criteria and processes further evaporated. In their place were constructed 'professional' definitions of value, norms and practices. Perhaps due to the extent to which professional development was locally organised, professional perspectives tended to be more plural than technical perspectives had been.

It might also be speculated (after Chin & Benne, 1976) that the use of power-coercive change strategies became far less tenable in ambiguously decentralised contexts and that rational-empirical approaches continued to have limited impact on the relatively conservative cultures of education. This suggests that normative-reeducative change strategies were the principal means available to would-be reformers by the early 1990s. In such conditions, it seems reasonable to assume that ideology could displace consequences and logic as the basis of policy justification. For example, massive structural changes were simply announced in some states of Australia using ideological rhetoric in a glossy brochure issued by the Minister's office. And, in schools and school districts where the emphasis was increasingly on cooperative learning, collegial professionalism, school-based staff development, collaborative consortia, teacher empowerment and participative policy making, the traditional meanings of 'accountability', quite understandably, became unthinkable.

One clear indicator of how politically incorrect the accountability issue has become is that comparatively few articles or recent texts on school restructuring use or index the term. One notable exception is scholarship and research in the politics of education, a field whose publications are largely unread by teachers. Policy studies in education have consistently noted the low levels of consensus between major stakeholder groups on appropriate forms of accountability, and the correlation of this phenomenon with low levels of internal and external legitimacy in systemic administrative policies (Hannaway & Crowson, 1989; Mitchell & Goertz, 1990: Fuhrman & Malen, 1991; Cibulka *et al.*, 1992; Marshall 1993). In a context where school restructuring has yet to produce an empirical base to justify its claims (Timar, 1990; Fullan, 1993), it is regularly recommended that education communities look to the quality of their accountability policies if they wish to retain the respect and support of their constituencies. The politically critical imperative involved points to the need to reconstruct school community understandings in order to create a responsible and educative form of politics. For example, Vann (1993) showed how important it will be to develop policies in England about how performance data will be collected and used. As Cibulka (1990, pp. 198-9) suggested, it is difficult

> to reconcile the conflicting purposes to which accountability reporting can be put, and ... arduous is the task of aligning the purpose with larger policy design and successful policy settlement .... Embedded in the controversy is the deeper, often unstated issue, of whether educators, elected officials, or individual parents should

> have the primary power over access to and uses of performance information. This is a political problem at the heart of democratic theory .... One thing seems certain. Performance information is reshaping the character of educational politics.

An interim conclusion is that accountability criteria and processes, especially performance data, are essential to the creation of legitimacy in education policies and in practices. Another is that whatever actually count as appropriate accountability criteria and processes in recent times, they have been generated largely through normative-reeducative and socio-political processes. This suggests that the reconstruction of the concepts involved will probably require a similar process. Events in Australia lends support to these proposals.

Current Dilemmas

In the 1980s, as noted above, Australian state governments moved to dismantle the centralist patterns of policy making and implementation in school systems. Schools were asked to assume new responsibilities, and increasingly, to self-manage their affairs. Most states set aside traditional Benthamite accountability mechanisms to do with pedagogy and school services while retaining high degrees of steerage over curriculum content, budgets and industrial relations (Macpherson, 1991b). As the 'down scaling' of bureaucratic structures unfolded, the traditional criteria and processes of accountability gradually evaporated.

The Cresap Report (1990), for example, ensured that Tasmania became one of the most devolved education systems in Australia. It drastically reduced the system's central office, eliminated regional structures and provided a slim presence at district level. Some of the fundamental assumptions about devolution across Australia, however, encountered stern criticism (Chapman, 1990; Chapman & Dunstan, 1991). For example, the devolutionary strategies assumed that the leaders of 'self-managing' schools would develop performance criteria and accountability processes that would be acceptable to school communities, remain responsive to state and national policies, and yet cohere with a holistic and educative approach to performance management (Beare *et al.*, 1989, Caldwell & Spinks, 1992, pp. 139-157). Any ambiguity over accountabilities, it was generally assumed, would detract from the legitimacy of public education, question the expertise presumed to underpin educational and administrative policies, and cast doubt on the professionalism of educators and on the leadership services provided by school executive teams.

The evidence, however, suggests that ambiguity over accountabilities is still widespread in Australia's devolved state systems, despite centralist controls, and closely associated with concerns over the productivity of state schools. Five indicators are now briefly described. First, there is considerable doubt over the appropriateness and effectiveness of post-devolution accountability structures in state education systems. The Executive Director of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Women's Affairs in New South Wales (NSW) (Grimshaw, 1990) admitted major difficulties in NSW over how to develop a "monitoring system that addresses the substance of educational issues, rather than simply structures and processes and simplistic, measurable 'performance indicators'" (p.13). In the post Scott Report (1990) era, NSW has reintroduced a technical form of accountability developed first in South Australia; systemic 'Quality Assurance'. Without the benefit of stakeholder preferences or systematic research, Cuttance (1994, forthcoming) has claimed that the approach is technically sounder because it focuses not on

quality control, but on the management of quality at all phases of the management process, at all levels and in all management systems. Highlighted in this approach are the role of performance indicators, more intensive strategic planning between, and at, each level, school reviews every three years and the production of School Development Plans. On the other hand, there does not appear to be an appreciation of the limits of this form of radical and technicist structuralism (Morgan, 1980). It appears to be politically insensitive to plural and local conceptions of professionalism and consumerism. It also seems to fail on its own terms; it is not comprehensive since teacher performance appraisal and student assessment are not yet part of this form of Total Quality Management. It is also highly likely to be associated with structural ambiguities and structural conflict; Quality Assurance officials in NSW report not to the line managers they work with at the school and regional levels but up through their own embedded but separate structures directly to the Assistant Director General (Quality Assurance). There seems little prospect of the South Australian model of Quality Assurance or its clone in New South Wales being further exported. The unit in the South Australian system managing 'Quality Assurance' has just been disestablished.

The second indicator of general ambiguity over accountabilities is a persistent concern over the productivity of state schools. Learning in core subjects is monitored with standardised tests in most systems and yet the comparative outcomes of inter-state education systems are systematically shrouded by the States' data collection, processing and storage protocols. The quality of teaching is sometimes evaluated using non-transparent processes to establish fitness for promotion. Leadership service is seldom subjected to critical review. Performance management in state education generally remains at an early stage of development. Outcomes budgeting is rare. Hence, the productivity of state schools can not be specified, expected or demonstrated in such a policy and performance data vacuum. In sharp contrast, there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence in every system that suggests that many schools have developed horizontal accountability relationships. Further, philosophical research in educational administration has derived performance criteria for educative leaders from a holistic and pragmatic moral theory (Walker *et al.*, 1987; Evers *et al.*, 1987; Duignan & Macpherson, 1992). This suggests that the policy vacuum might yet be filled and suggest sensitive, wise and effective methods of collecting and using performance information.

Third, as Beare (1989) has shown, there is falling surety in Australian state schools about the nature, currency and implications of public expectations. Sophisticated data are not collected and the situation does not appear likely to change. Australian state schools do not appear to be significantly more responsive to public expectations after the devolution of decision making powers related to teaching, learning and school development. There is rising concern among experts, clients and professionals over the relationship between public choice, education policies and professional practices. There is rising doubt that school leaders can provide educative forms and appropriate levels of accountability related to public choice making processes or link them to annual planning processes and to day-to-day management practices.

Fourth, an inquiry has been considering some aspects of the policy dilemmas related to accountabilities at the national level. The cooperative 'National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning' (NPQTL) is focussing on a national framework for teachers' qualifications, current work organisation in schools, teachers' education, professional development and training, and on "the managerial, professional and para-professional support structures within school and school systems which assist in improving teaching and learning including the role of appraisal and

management and accountability by objectives and results" (NPQTL, 1991:3). Given the nature of processes used, however, it seems that there is little likelihood of major and immediate changes in the nation's classrooms flowing from this forum.

Fifth, there is some uncertainty whether the Labor Federal Government will actually provide the extensive leadership education it promised to educators across Australia and find ways of overriding states' views, most of which are now governed by non-Labor administrations. Funds are being used by the Commonwealth to encourage the adoption of National Curriculum content frameworks, sometimes bypassing State authorities. The Commonwealth recently negotiated and signed an accord with the Australian Education Union concerning the implementation of Commonwealth education policies across all States without the participation of State authorities. While the Commonwealth retain taxation powers, and the States retain constitutional authority over education policy, the potential for misunderstanding remains considerable.

There are a number of implications. First, accountability criteria and processes, especially performance data, are not likely to be negotiated easily in such a contested context. The policy stage is so crowded by State and Federal players, commissioned by Ministers and primarily concerned with structural power, general national curriculum frameworks and funding issues, that there is little serious prospect of vertical policy coherence concerning educational matters much above school-district level. The creation of legitimacy in policies and in practices is likely to be more feasible at local levels. And what will count as accountability criteria and processes will have to be generated with stakeholders through normative-reeducative and socio-political processes, hopefully linking school communities to district and regional levels. The question now is how this might be achieved. The answer proposed and illustrated here is to mount policy research intended to produce educative policy proposals.

METHODOLOGY

Definitions

It is generally regarded as good sense, and essential to trustworthy research, to define terms as well as possible prior to the exercise. The key terms here are accountability, criteria and process. It is a paradox that while two people might begin their research by defining these terms using competitive theories of accountability, it is the competition between theories that constitutes a prior condition for the continuous growth of knowledge (Lakatos, in Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970, p. 173). This competition acts through a process of semantic ascent (Quine, 1960, p. 272) which:

> carries the discussion into a domain where both parties are better agreed on the objects (viz., words) and on the main terms concerning them. Words, or their inscriptions, unlike points, miles, classes, and the rest, are tangible objects of the size so popular in the marketplace, where men of unlike conceptual schemes communicate at their best. The strategy is one of ascending to a common part of two fundamentally disparate conceptual schemes, the better to discuss the disparate foundations.

A structural-functionalist view of educational administration (Morgan, 1980) brings with it a classical set of definitions. Accountability means answerability concerning one's conduct and duties. Such answering requires both a process and a relationship through which a person or group can account for the discharge of their obligations. Providers of services may account to themselves, peers, clients or superordinates. Effective accountability, it follows, implies the collection and reporting of objective data, evaluation against appropriate criteria and planning systematically for improvement in the one real world.

Unfortunately, definitions of the 'real world' are social constructions (Greenfield, 1975; 1988). Hence, while criteria are the standards, benchmarks or indicators used to make judgements, the data used inevitably embody objective, subjective and normative dimensions. Radical humanists note that although processes are the procedures, actions or methods used to collect information, to provide feedback and to plan, they can be used to create psychic prisons or emancipatory conditions (Bates, 1980; 1983; 1988; 1990; Foster, 1986). And yet, common ground is likely to be available, especially given Robinson's (1994) reformulation of critical research. She argued that the effectiveness of critical theory can be enhanced (p. 73):

> to the extent that it generates explanations which point to a problem's resolution, that it fosters the identification and motivation of agents whose energy and enthusiasm can drive the change process, and that it incorporates a micropolitics that helps critical researchers collaboratively resolve the ethical dilemmas inherent in the approach.

In this spirit, critical educators might accept that judgement making should pertain to the quality of, and how to continuously improve, three interactive and interdependent realms of action in context; learning, teaching and leadership. Nevertheless, functionalist researchers will insist that such judgement making is technically enhanced by coherence between strategic plans, operational plans bounded by objectives, and methods of mapping progress and performance against goals. Interpretivists will emphasise how antecedents, interaction and values inform the perceptions and beliefs that help explain such functionalist actions. Socially critical researchers will note the potentially alienating effects of reporting, evaluating and planning, and call for criteria and processes that help transform the quality of political, economic and social relations, along with the quality of teaching, learning and leadership.

The appropriateness of criteria are, therefore, determined by reference to the primary purposes of accountability structures. They can be limited to the collection of data that indicate the extent to which objectives have been achieved. Such reporting and evaluation requires only summative criteria. Further planning is required only if objectives have not been fully realised. The purposes of accountability, however, can be extended to require formative criteria, which, in turn, will trigger the need for additional data concerning the continuing appropriateness of structures, objectives and strategic purposes. The performance data collected could thereby inform the next phase of the planning cycle, help planners evaluate the quality of their planning and appraise the strategic assumptions supporting their corporate plan. Another facet of touchstone is apparent here; the feedback of performance data is crucial to the growth of knowledge about service (Evers, *et al.*, 1987).

To summarise this section, the appropriateness and effectiveness of accountability processes may be determined by reference to (a) primary purposes to be served, (b) the patterns

of reasonable obligations (to whom, how, how often, on what basis), (c) the nature of the performance and outcomes data required, and (d) how collected data is to be processed, stored and used. The efficiency of processes may also be enhanced by designing systems so that data may serve multiple purposes. One increasingly familiar method is to organise integrated management information systems that draw on multiple databases with ethical safeguards.

More generally, while definitions are required to give some order to a research program, they have the potential to damage the competition between theories that is required to promote the growth of knowledge. The provisional position taken here is that accepting responsibility in education implies accountability, which, in turn, implies the need for purposes, criteria and processes whereby formative evaluation, performance feedback and planning for improvement may occur. Educative accountability criteria and processes are defined as those that evaluate, report and improve the quality of students' learning, teachers' teaching and leaders' leadership in a complex and changing context. The next challenge is how to create an educative accountability policy in context so that processes, outcomes and implications may be better understood.

Practical Ethics and Epistemology

Rather than develop an abstract methodology unrelated to the 'real world' of policy making, the discussion past this point relates to a policy research project under way in the system of primary and secondary schools managed by the Tasmanian Government's Department of Education and the Arts. This system already has an international profile in the literature of educational administration. It is the 'home' of the self-managing school (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; 1992). Claims by some of its principals, however, that they are self-managing 'near-autonomous' schools, has resulted in the Department revising the rhetoric of self-management to include technical and consumerist metaphors that emphasise effective, efficient, shared and responsive local management. "Educational accountability policies in locally-managed schools" (Harrington, 1992) became a research priority for the Department and the policy research described below was commissioned. The project has since attracted additional support from the University of Tasmania and the Australian Research Council's Small and Large Grants Schemes.

The first task was to map and understand the forms of accountability preferred by parents, teachers, district superintendents and their assistants, senior system managers, unions, parents organisations and others. The intention was to better understood each stakeholder view, reconcile them as far as possible through discussions, and then to translate shared perspectives or touchstone into flexible and workable policy proposals. These proposals are to be in the form of an accountability policy framework with mechanisms that (a) are both educative and technically sound, (b) are able to provide real avenues for collegial judgement and expert input; and (c) celebrate client interests and the growth of knowledge about learning, teaching and leading schools in Tasmania. To complete the policy research, the proposals are to be illustrated with exemplars drawn from Tasmanian schools to encourage the transfer of best practice.

Two prior research programs concerned with educative leadership and non-foundational epistemology have suggested that it should be possible to generate educative performance management policy proposals for locally-managed government schools using these methods. The development of a practical theory of educative leadership (Duignan & Macpherson, 1993) demonstrated the importance of coherence between three conditions; (a) leaders at all levels providing coherent processes that boost the creation, promotion and applications of knowledge

about how best to be organised (b) feedback on performance and outcomes accepted as crucial to the growth of knowledge, and (c) educational organisations being regarded as moral cultures and receiving moral leadership. While the first two conditions cohere with a social action theory of learning, and need not be reviewed here, the third is derived from a consequencialist moral framework of five parts now summarised (after Evers *et al.*, in Evers, 1987).

First, the decisions made by leaders that have consequences for others have, by definition, a moral dimension. Such decision making should, therefore, be subject to moral appraisal. It follows, in education, that such an appraisal should be conducted in accordance with a moral theory that values problem solving and the growth of knowledge. Second, the moral knowledge on which educative leaders base their actions and judgements about whether something is right or wrong, is not a separate and distinct form of knowledge. It is part and parcel of a total pattern of knowledge, understandings and beliefs; a web of belief (Quine & Ullian, 1978). The growth and development of this web of belief is continuous and illustrates the same broad principles that govern the growth of knowledge in general. Third, in not-uncommon conditions where power is diffused, leaders should be open to moral appraisal to the extent that they have decision-making control. In situations where many hands steer policy, an individual's contribution should also be appraised for the extent to which it enhances the growth of understanding and knowledge about the organisation and its learning systems. Fourth, educative leaders must help create the conditions to make this form of learning possible by being personally educative, that is, by creating and promoting learning throughout all levels of their organisation. Such learning has to be enhanced by informed feedback from all those affected by decisions. Indeed, as decisions with a moral component have consequences for others, there is an obligation on those who make decisions to be sensitive to how others are affected and to the effectiveness of feedback processes. Fifth, for leaders to claim they are educative means they must be able to develop and maintain a climate that promotes inquiry, values problem solving, welcomes criticism, and encourages participation and learning about organisation. Openness to criticism and an ability to learn from mistakes becomes the basis for more valuable leadership action and cycles of reflection and decision making.

The implications are immediate and practical. This consequencialist moral theory suggests that educative leaders should be judged by five criteria; (a) their ability to develop and maintain an effective inquiry and problem-solving climate in their domain, (b) their respect and tolerance of different points of view and an acceptance of criticism as the key ingredient in the growth of knowledge within the organisation, (c) their ability to adapt to challenges and provide for change in policy or practices through participative feedback and reflection, (d) their concern to ensure that people have the freedom to fully participate in this process of learning and growth, and (e) their commitment to the holistic belief that their decisions can be defended on the basis of their contribution to the benefits of long-term learning within the organisation.

The epistemological implications of the research task follow from the politically critical requirement to legitimate policy proposals with all stakeholders as they are being developed. An early challenge is that stake-holder's knowledge about such a controversial issue as accountability will be available in subjective, objective and normative types of data, each of which needs to be honoured conditionally on its own terms. This is not a new problem in education as Soltis (1984) observed (p. 5):

> There are many different languages and logics in educational research. One helpful way to get some perspective on them is to see their roots in three dominant 20th century philosophical traditions *(a la* Bernstein): logical empiricism (positivism); interpretive theories (analytic, phenomenological, and hermeneutic); and critical theory (neo-Marxist).
>
> Another way is to demonstrate, through an analysis of the universal phenomena of pedagogy, that empirical (causal), interpretive (meaningful), and critical (normative) dimensions characterize pedagogy and hence all need to be studied if pedagogical research is to be honest to its subject matter.

While this holism is patently wise, the problem here is that there are doubts about the reliability of the foundational assumptions of each of the positivist, phenomenological and socially critical theories of knowledge. Naive multi-perspectivalism implies compounding the strengths and limits of each of the three knowledge systems without realising the deeper flaws they share. These deeper problems are revealed by five questions. How do beliefs and assumptions of each of the theories of knowledge come to acquire foundational status? Are these foundational assumptions universal absolutes or based on discipline-specific knowledge? Will these foundational premises always be reliable, or, how will we know when they are losing or gaining in reliability? What justifies having faith in foundational assumptions or, if they are not absolutes, a reliable way of specifying degrees of faith in them? What is the unique epistemic nature of a foundational assumption on which trustworthy knowledge can be built?

This questioning serves to suggest that positivistic, phenomenological and socially critical theories of knowledge appear to share two epistemic flaws. One, they partition the domain of knowledge. Two, they rely on arbitrary and unjustified foundational claims to validate the partitions they employ. As demonstrated elsewhere (Evers, 1979; 1984; 1987; 1988; Walker & Evers, 1982; 1984, Lakomski, 1987), when these foundational claims about the divisions to knowledge are traced to their origins, they appear to be the preloved articles of faith of a 'discipline' or to be an expression of ideological commitment, rather than intrinsically secure and universally reliable truths.

Escaping from this problem of vicious regress means setting aside both the partitioning of knowledge and the practice of appealing to foundational premises when building theory with research. Instead of seeking a linear and vertical logic between premises, hypothesis, data and findings to establish new theory, it appears to be better advised to construct a multidimensional and multiperspectival network (Quine & Ullian, 1978; Hesse, 1974; 1980) that accommodates beliefs, sensed data, known solutions, and less traditional sources of ideas, such as paradox, dialectic, intuitions and speculations. An immediate implication of this non-foundational approach to policy research is that the network of ideas used as the conceptual frame of reference (after Elmore & Associates, 1990) will have to be regarded as a provisional assembly, and be evaluated regularly as components are added or adjusted in a holistic way. As Walker *et al.* argued (in Walker, 1987), it means (p. 15):

> emphasising *coherence* between theoretical, empirical and value items. Our beliefs, or knowledge claims, are justified to the extent that they cohere with each other, meaning how logically consistent or tightly integrated they are with each other. Our knowledge claims, including reports of empirical evidence and personal

> experience, are judged by the degree to which they cohere with the whole of our current knowledge and with the assumptions underpinning the most effective solutions to our practical problems. Thus we judge theoretical views on education by their internal coherence, their coherence with evidence (including practical experience) and their coherence with the rest of 'our theory of the world'. We judge theories as wholes, and as wholes within a whole 'theory of the world'.

Non-foundational epistemology (N-FE) permits a collaborative search by stakeholders for a better shared sense of alternative theories of educative accountability. Divergent perspectives will be especially valued since N-FE requires trustworthy knowledge to grow through competition between theories. The competition would be about providing the best general account of educative accountability as problematic practice. N-FE exerts pressure on those theorising to discover coherence between experience, data and beliefs while denying any *a priori* epistemic status to any particular assumption, such as (say) 'accountability as performance measurement'. Instead, N-FE encourages the emergence of comprehensive, logical and practical explanations based on the areas where theories overlap. The process of finding this overlap between theories of accountability, or touchstone, begins with two questions (Walker *et al.*, in Walker, 1987, p. 16):

> How ... do we judge between competing theories? How do we apply the coherence test? We extract *common standards* from the overlapping accounts of shared problems, or we adopt them from other shared areas of the theoretical frameworks of participants. By examining the actual content of touchstone, we discover what values and procedures each of the competing theories is committed to in common with the others, and ask which of the theories comes out best in view of these shared values and procedures.

N-FE does not permit any deference to foundational items of knowledge outside the realm of theory, items such as objectified facts, subjective experience, ideological commitments or 'political realities'. It acknowledges that evidence is riddled with the theoretical assumptions used during its creation, and that beliefs can have degrees of empirical validity and subjective potency. There can be, by the lights of N-FE, no neat distinction between facts, perceptions and values. As Willower (in Boyan, 1988, p. 742) put it, it is "an epistemology that recognises the fallibility of science and seeks warranted assertibility ..., not certainty." It does this by taking the whole view and by selecting the most coherent explanation of the situation and proposed solutions.

To summarise, this approach to policy research uses a holistic test of justification and a coherence test of evidence. It does not employ a coherence test of truth. Instead, "what justifies a claim, what warrants our claim to *know that a statement is true*, is its coherence with the rest of our theory of the world" (Walker *et al.*, in Walker 1987, p. 18). The point here is that (Evers, 1984, p. 24):

> a comprehensive, coherent and systematic set of human epistemic practices should carry within itself the conditions for its own justification. Moreover, we shall find this hardly surprising considering that there is no privileged vantage point outside

> of a comprehensive system of belief from which the system can be assessed. Indeed, the real irony is that in admitting that we are creatures who have evolved to the point of possessing a conceptual scheme that permits us to ask questions about its justification, the case against an idealist, non-genetic, non-material account of knowledge has already been decided. Ontogenesis *does* recapitulate epistemology.

Particular epistemic criteria (after Quine & Ullian, 1978, Ch. 6) will be used to help guide policy building, in addition to subjecting "it to the empirical test" (Robinson, 1994, p. 74). The first, conservativeness, will be used to encourage wise incremental elaborations that respect past beliefs and to limit the liabilities that go with accepting a new accountabilities policy framework. The second, modesty, will mean accepting the least extravagant theory of educative accountability that 'does the job'. The third, simplicity, the epistemic equivalent of Ockhams' Razor, will be used to cut away redundant complexity. Fourth used will be generality or comprehensiveness; the wider the range of applications of its explanatory power, the more trustworthy in general terms a theory will become. Fifth will be the virtue of refutability; the cost of retaining a theory in the face of imaginable events.

To round out this list of "the major extra-empirical virtues of coherent theories", Evers & Lakomski (1991, p. 63) have added consistency, fecundity (or potency) and explanatory unity. Together with the standard qualities of empirical data, their evaluative framework will be used to refine policy touchstone. Finally, Evers & Lakomski's framework will itself be examined regularly to see if it remains a 'comprehensive, coherent and systematic set of human epistemic practices' that possesses the conditions for its own justification.

Data, Phases and Progress

Five bodies of literature were consulted at the outset to provide a context to the policy research (the following references are only illustrative, not exhaustive, of the type of literature considered):

- the literature on accountability in education (e.g.s Raywid, 1985; Cohen, 1988; Sykes & Elmore, 1989; Elmore & Associates, 1990; Cibulka, 1991);
- the literature on locally-managed schools (e.g.s Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; 1993: Beare, *et al.*, 1989; Cuban, 1990; Caldwell, 1990; Jenkins, 1991);
- the literature on consumerism in education (e.g.s Sallis, 1979; Sockett, 1980; Kogan, 1988; Torrance, 1990);
- the literature on educative leadership (e.g.s Duignan & Macpherson, 1987; 1991; 1993; Evers, 1987; Walker, 1987; Northfield *et al.* 1987; Pettit *et al.*, 1990; Rizvi *et al.*, 1990: Macpherson, 1993); and
- the literature on school and system restructuring (e.g.s McPherson & Raab, 1988; Elmore & Associates, 1990; Murphy & Hallinger, 1993; Beare & Boyd, 1993; Forsyth & Tallerico, 1993; Martin & Macpherson, 1993).

As briefly noted above, a three phase policy research project was designed. The first phase involves mapping policy preferences concerning appropriate accountability criteria and processes in schools. A range of stakeholders have been consulted. Stratified samples of community groups, teacher groups, system administrators, principals and others such as union leaders and parents' representative, were all interviewed prior to the development of instruments that measure the intensity of policy preferences held by each interest group. The iterative processes produced increasingly parallel items that indicated an emerging degree of touchstone.

The second phase, again iterative, involves expanding the common ground between these perspectives through discussions of the maps of preferences with the major stakeholder groups, systematically refining 'touchstone'. In many senses these elite stakeholders act as co-researchers to (a) refine their understanding of their own groups' views on accountability, (b) identify the extent of common ground or 'touchstone' that is available for policy building and the shared values it represents, (c) help others understand that conflicts in policy preferences are theories about accountability in competition, (d) use 'touchstone' values to test alternative proposals and to reconcile them to a degree, and (d) identify exemplary practices in schools which, together, illustrate the nature and scope of touchstone.

The third phase will involve making the touchstone policy available to schools and systems, with stakeholder support, along with practical exemplars of practice and incentives to encourage the transfer of this practical knowledge.

Progress to date has been uneven. The first objective in 1992 was to negotiate support for the project. Provisional support for the project was gained from all major stakeholder groups. Funds were acquired and a Research Office was established. The second objective for 1992 was to collect data; the expressed preferences about forms of accountability acceptable in the client communities of Tasmania's Government schools. Public submissions were invited. Interest groups' opinion leaders were interviewed. Workshops to clarify preferences were conducted with a stratified sample of school communities (parents and students) in all parts of Tasmania. The topic was discussed at an annual state conference of parents and at workshops organised at conferences of researchers and policy makers in education (e.g., Macpherson, 1992b).

The volume of workshop and interview data was seriously underestimated. There were many requests to provide data well into 1993. The Cresap Report (1990, pp. 37-8) had indicated that there were 165 primary schools, 34 secondary schools and 25 district high schools in Tasmania. A one eighth stratified sample (28) of these school communities was randomly selected to help ensure that workshop data represented variations in school size and location. Since the Years 11-12 secondary colleges serve regional rather than local communities, they were not included. The data collected from parents and students were expressed preferences for accountability criteria and processes.

The first objective in 1993 was to collect more data; expressed preferences about accountability criteria and processes from systemic or technical and professional perspectives. This again meant inviting public submissions, interviewing interest group opinion leaders and senior officials, conducting preference clarification workshops with stratified samples of teachers and administrators, and having accountability discussed at the state conferences of key interest groups. The second objective for 1993 was to review national and international experiences and research into structural options that articulate technical and collegial perspectives. The third objective for 1993 was to begin comparative analysis; a British Council Travel Grant supported

contact with leading policy researchers in Britain. The research was delayed when the writer accepted a major leadership challenge from October 1992 until the end of 1993. On the other hand, other studies sustained some progress and are providing degrees of triangulation. Barber (1992) reviewed national and international experiences and research into educational consumerism. Ewington (1993) surveyed Tasmanian parent's perceptions of school effectiveness. Wilson (1994, forthcoming) is analysing teachers' views and Davies (1994, forthcoming) is mapping the policy preferences of teacher union leaders.

The first objective in 1994 is to complete data collection and analyses initiated in 1993. An additional search of the international literature is under way to map recent advances in educative and holistic conceptions of accountability for systems of self-managing schools. Workshops at national conferences and international discussions are planned An invited policy seminar in Launceston on accountability will debate the policy options prior to publication. The outcomes will be made available in interim reports to sponsors and in articles for scholars and professionals.

It is important to note that the early and sustained development of relationships with all stakeholder groups constitutes a major implementation strategy in itself, quite apart from the dissemination of ideas illustrated by exemplars. And while the writer has taken the main responsibility for managing the project, other members of the School of Education at the University of Tasmania, other personnel at the Tasmanian Department of Education and leaders in all stakeholder groups are making major contributions to the policy process. The significant involvement of specialists in universities and in public service nationally and internationally is also acknowledged.

CONCLUDING NOTE

A comprehensive literature review (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992, p. 541) led to the conclusion that

> school-based management should be developed by (a) joining SBM with curriculum and instructional reform as part of a coordinated effort to improve school productivity; (b) decentralising to school sites real power, an aggressive staff development process, a comprehensive school data base, and new compensation systems; (c) investigating how SBM can create a new organizational culture; and (d) developing district and school leadership that supports SBM.

In this paper it has been argued that such administrative policy proposals ought to be constructed and tested simultaneously through practical policy research with reference to ideas from elsewhere. The approach recommended began with a moral imperative; the accepting of responsibility in education implies the need for accountability. It was argued that an educative accountability policy would be most explicit in formative evaluation, educative reporting relationships and politically critical planning. It then mounted and illustrated a case for the production of educative accountability policies through policy research that relies on, and then tests, a non-foundational epistemology.

The methodology and research project reported is attempting to reconcile professional, client and technical perspectives through the active engagement of school, district and state level stake-holders. The remaining practical challenge for the project is to identify and expand the touchstone lying between client, technical and professional perspectives in Tasmania's system of

self-managing schools. The theory challenges ahead include (a) evaluating the emergent proposals using the rigour of N-FE, and (b) evaluating the extent to which N-FE satisfies its own account of knowledge production during such policy research.

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